

Political Developments in the Philippines

Growing tensions between Aquino's civilian advisers and the military are threatening the stability of the governing coalition and possibly setting the stage for Defense Minister Enrile's departure.

- According to the US Embassy, senior presidential advisers are becoming increasingly hostile towards Enrile and are pushing Aquino to either limit his influence or remove him from the Cabinet. Aquino's advisers hope to divest Enrile of key positions in the coconut industry which they believe he uses to finance a personal security force within the military reform movement.
- Rumors last week that Enrile would be fired during 12 June Independence Day ceremonies led to subsequent rumors that he would lead a preemptive military coup. Neither development materialized, but additional coup rumors continue to exacerbate civilian-military tensions.
- In weekend conversations with Embassy officers, Enrile expressed his doubts about Aquino's leadership and complained of his inability to communicate with her close advisers. In addition, he continues to be publicly critical of the government's counterinsurgency strategy.

The Communist Party is caught up in a heated internal strategy debate and an apparent leadership struggle, but its military wing--the New People's Army--retains the initiative against the government.

- hard liners replaced by moderates*
- A source considered reliable by the US Embassy says that Party hardliners who were responsible for the decision to boycott the February presidential election--which the party has officially admitted was a mistake--have been replaced by moderates in the Central Committee who are more inclined to negotiate with the government.

- insurgents should have upper hand*
- both the Party and the government are anxious to buy time by engaging in cease-fire talks, but that both sides are playing it by ear and each expects that a resumption of armed conflict is likely in the longer term.

- In the face of Aquino's restrictions on military activity against the insurgents, guerrilla forces in recent weeks have led a series of successful ambushes and attacks on town halls, police stations, and municipal facilities. The insurgents have generally had the upper hand in fighting that has left over 1000 people dead since Aquino assumed power in late February.

Early sessions of the constitutional commission have been characterized by political grandstanding, but the commission's members are getting down to business and appear to be drafting a moderate, representative document.

- Press and Embassy reports indicate that the proceedings have been delayed by the political posturing of leftist and opposition delegates, but that the moderates--who dominate the commission and include some of Aquino's close advisers--are setting the procedural rules and taking steps to ensure that Aquino's 2 September target date for a draft constitution is met.

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- The public statements of commission members so far reflect general plans for a constitution that re-establishes a democratically-elected legislature, imposes limits on presidential authority, and avoids controversial statements of general principle--such as a clause addressing the issue of foreign military bases.